

# EXPRESSING YOUR OWN VOICE

The excerpts from the short essay below illustrate how the **writer's own voice** and **cited experts' voices** fit together in academic writing. The essay task is: *In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon.*

Essay	Feature
<p>A major change that has occurred in Western countries is an increased incidence of divorce. Whereas in the past divorce was a relatively rare occurrence, in recent times it has become quite commonplace. An important issue for sociologists, and indeed for all society, is why these changes in marital patterns have occurred. Two possible explanations for the divorce phenomenon are changes to divorce laws and broader socio-economic change. This essay will critically analyse these explanations and the impact each has had on the divorce rate in Europe, the United States and Australia. While legal changes have contributed to increased divorce rates, the major contributing factors are most likely changes to social and economic behaviour within society.</p>	<p><b>Introduction in the writer's own voice:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• general context and overview of topic</li> <li>• rationale/purpose</li> <li>• signposting</li> <li>• thesis statement</li> </ul>
<p>One type of explanation for rising divorce has focused on changes in laws relating to marriage. For example, Bilton et al. (2007) argue that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable. It is possible, they claim, that there has always been a degree of marital instability. They suggest that changes in the law have been significant because they have provided unhappily married couples with "access to a legal solution to pre-existent marital problems" (p. 301). Like Bilton et al. (2007), Madden (2013) also believes that changes in divorce rates can be best explained in terms of changes in the legal system. Whilst these studies indicate that changes in the law have increased divorce rates in that divorce has become more accessible, these explanations do not address the reasons for couples seeking divorce. Thus, the problem with these explanations is that they do not consider why these laws have changed in the first place. It could be argued that reforms to family law, as well as the increased rate of divorce that has accompanied them, are the product of more fundamental changes in society.</p>	<p><b>Topic sentence in writer's own voice, without citations</b></p> <p><b>Linking words (e.g. 'for example', 'also') help the writer control the text and explain how the cited sources relate to the topic.</b></p> <p><b>Credible academic sources provide evidence for the argument being made.</b></p> <p><b>Writer demonstrates understanding of cited sources by using appropriate reporting verbs (e.g. claim, suggest)</b></p> <p><b>Analysis, interpretation and evaluation of ideas</b></p> <p><b>Linking sentence</b></p>

<p>Another type of explanation is one that focuses precisely on these broad societal changes. For example, Hart (2013) argues that increases in divorce rates and marital breakdown are the result of economic changes that have affected the family. One example of these changes is the raised material aspirations of families, which Hart (2013) suggests has put pressure on both spouses to become wage earners. Women as a result have been forced to become both homemakers and economic providers. According to Hart (2013), the contradiction of these two roles has led to conflict and this is the main cause of marital breakdown. However, Hart's (2013) explanation cannot account for all cases of divorce. For example, as Apostol and Lee's (2010) study illustrated, marital breakdown also commonly occurs in families where only the husband is working. Nevertheless, the argument that changes in family relations are related to broader social forces seems to be more promising than one that looks only at legislative change.</p>	<p>Topic sentence</p> <p>Linking and reporting words to introduce and external voice</p> <p>Credible source summarised to provide evidence for point being made</p> <p>Own analysis / evaluation of first source</p> <p>Second source added for a more well-rounded argument</p> <p>Own insight based on interpretation of cited sources</p>
<p>It is difficult to offer a comprehensive explanation for the growing trend of marital breakdown within the parameters of this paper. However, it is worth pointing out that, whilst it appears to be a time of increased family instability, research suggests that historically, instability may have been the norm rather than the exception. In any case, as has been highlighted in this essay, changes in the rate of divorce in Western countries cannot be adequately explained by changes to divorce laws alone. More comprehensive reasons are to be found within a broader socio-economic perspective that considers how changes in financial and social expectations impact families resulting in an increase of those seeking a solution in divorce.</p>	<p>Conclusion in the writer's own voice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drawing together findings</li> <li>• summarising main points</li> <li>• stating an overall conclusion in order to answer the assignment question</li> </ul>

Essay adapted from: <http://www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/general/essay/sample/index.xml>